

ARNOLD ARBORETUM
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



FLORICULTURE

BULLETIN
OF POPULAR INFORMATION

SERIES 4. VOL. V

MAY 28, 1937

NUMBER 6

A TRIP THROUGH THE ARBORETUM DURING LILAC TIME

THOUSANDS of people have had the opportunity of visiting the Arboretum during the past ten days, and they have been fortunate for the Arboretum is now at its best. This Bulletin is written in order to aid our many visitors in remembering a few of the many things they have seen in bloom. Perhaps too, those who have been less fortunate and were unable to visit the plantations during this period, may derive some enjoyment from reading this enumeration of the plants of outstanding beauty which have been admired by so many.

Most of the trees and shrubs at the Arboretum are looking better this year than they have for several years past, merely because the mild weather has not injured any of the flower buds. We have been unable to find any evidence of winter injury due to low temperatures. Elsewhere in eastern Massachusetts, particularly where rock garden plants and perennials are grown, there has been considerable injury owing to lack of snow during last winter from the soil heaving and exposing the roots of the plants, but fortunately this has not been true of the trees and shrubs. Many of the azaleas, the flowering dogwood, and the lilacs have really been exceptionally beautiful during the past ten days because the flower buds have been untouched by the winter cold and all have fully opened.

Starting the trip through the Arboretum from the Jamaica Plain gate, we first notice the peculiar green flowers of the native *Magnolia acuminata* beginning to bloom. The flowers of the Asiatic magnolias have long since passed. Continuing on the road from the Administration Building we pass the lindens and an excellent bed of *Rhododendron roseum* which has been in full flower for an entire week. A little farther on, near the horse chestnuts, is a planting of the daintily colored pinkshell azalea, *Rhododendron Vaseyi*, which adds a bright spot to any landscape scene. Opposite this are the many forms of the Japanese maples coming out into full leaf, and the brilliant red of their foliage makes a beautiful contrast with the white flowering dogwoods close-by. In the woods are several hundred torch azaleas, *Rhododendron obtusum Kaempferi*, which have been in full bloom for over a week, and because of the excellent shade of the surrounding oaks, their flowers

keep their color for a considerably longer period than do those of azaleas planted out in the full sun.

Leaving the road for a moment, we stroll through these azaleas to a knoll in the woods overlooking the shrub collection. Approximately a thousand different shrubs are growing here, and with a hasty glance from our vantage point we notice that there are not many plants in bloom. At the extreme left there is a bright spot of white close to the ground (*Iberis Tenoreana*), and nearby another bright spot of yellow (*Alyssum gemonense*), blooming at the same time, while *Iberis sempervirens* will not bloom for another week. Looking farther, we see the white of some spiraeas in bloom, and at the end of the collection the tall pearlbushes in full bloom. In front of us is a long row of vari-colored varieties of the Japanese quince, but as these have been in bloom for over two weeks they have now nearly lost their brilliance.

Beyond the shrub collection, along the road on the farther side we see the last of *Malus spectabilis*, one of the double-flowering crab apples, and the first of the common pink Bechtel's crab coming into bloom. When the wind changes for a few minutes, we can immediately identify the fragrance of the bush honeysuckles which are now in full bloom nearby.

Continuing from the woods interplanted with torch azaleas, we glance backward through the shrubbery overhanging a pond on the left to see an excellent planting of *Rhododendron Vaseyi* in full bloom, the dainty shell-pink color of the flowers reflected in the still water at their feet. Continuing between the ponds we turn to the right and approach the lilac collection.

What a sight! The bank is one mass of color. In this collection, one of the two best in the world, are over 400 different kinds of lilacs including over 300 different varieties of *Syringa vulgaris* alone. A good growing season followed by a mild winter has resulted in a profuseness of bloom unequalled for several years past. One of the first plants to draw our attention is the dark purple variety of *Syringa vulgaris* named "Ludwig Spaeth." We admire it, walk under its branches, and look up the lilac walk, bordered on both sides with lilacs ten feet tall and covered with blossoms. We notice at least two lilacs (*Syringa amurensis*, the Japanese tree lilac, and *S. villosa*, the late lilac) that are not in bloom, for these come later, one in July and one in June. Continuing up the walk among the lilacs, we see the most fragrant of all, *S. pubescens*, and can easily recognize its value even though its flowers are not conspicuously colored.

On the left of the walk is the interesting small Persian lilac and its several varieties. Nearby is *S. chinensis*, the first known hybrid, resulting from a cross between *S. persica* and *S. vulgaris*. One of its varieties, *S. chinensis Saugeana*, is particularly valued for its dark reddish flowers. Both the Persian and the Chinese lilacs are valued for their profuse, graceful, nodding sprays of flower clusters which make them among the best for cut flower purposes.

Near the end of the row of lilacs, placed between the walk and the road, are two plants outstanding for their deep reddish-purple flowers, namely "Congo" and "Negro." Incidentally, it was this row of lilacs which was cut to the ground ten years ago in an effort to reduce the size of the plants and so force them to

grow into better specimens which would be appreciated more. A critical survey of these same plants today will show that this severe treatment has resulted in plants which are now in excellent condition. Many people who knew this row of plants the year it was cut to the ground have remarked this season that although such rough treatment is not always warranted it has certainly proved worth while in this case.

On the hill at the extreme end of the lilac collection are the younger lilacs recently added. One of these shows promise of becoming the darkest of all the dark lilacs. This is named "Mrs. W. E. Marshall" and is of very recent origin. Many of these lilacs are so intriguing that it is necessary to walk over the grassy path at the top of the collection and see close at hand some of the plants that we could only glimpse from below. One of these is a stunning single white variety named "Vestale" which is unusually well-flowered this year. Another variety close by is the double-flowered "Edith Cavell" also outstanding for its white flowers.

Of the pink varieties, "Macrostachya," "Lucie Baltet," and "Clara Cochet" can all be observed in order, one after the other, growing along this path. Farther along on the right we must stop to admire the best of the pale blue lilacs, "President Lincoln," the flowers of which are a wedgewood blue. It is most difficult among so many fine specimens to decide definitely on a few "best." Professor Sargent use to say that the "best" lilacs were always those that happened to have the best flowers that year, and perhaps this should be our conclusion.

Climbing up toward the top of Bussey Hill we pass through an old lilac hedge which is easily one hundred and twenty-five years old. These bushes are seldom pruned and sprayed, and are living examples of what lilacs will do under adverse conditions. They are now about ten feet tall (having been cut to the ground several years ago) and almost twice as broad, but even with the lack of care they do have many blooms each year. At the top of Bussey Hill in the Chinese Collection we find many things in full bloom. Our first impression is one of brilliant yellow color coming from the brooms which are at their best. These belong to the genera *Cytisus* and *Genista*. One plant stands out particularly among these because of its brilliant mass of profuse lemon-yellow flowers. This is *Cytisus praecox*, and those who have admired it will be glad to know that it is available from certain nurseries.

To the right of this walk, across from the brooms, we see the last of the royal azalea, which is one of the first in the collection on the hill to bloom. Over the brow of the hill we notice many of the torch azaleas dotting the hillside here and there. Walking on toward the century old pine trees, acting as guardian sentinels for the entire collection we pass a bed of two beautiful azaleas, *Rhododendron roseum* and *Rhododendron nudiflorum*. These came into full bloom on lilac Sunday, and their sweet fragrance fills the air. Beyond these is the Poukhan azalea, its lavender-purple flowers fading rapidly for it has been at its best for almost two weeks. However, one or two of the plants which are late to bloom indicate to us what the entire planting must have looked like when it was at its best.

We notice that the dove tree, so interesting because of its history, has again disappointed plant lovers and has not bloomed. This tree was killed to the ground during the cold winter of 1933-34 and has not bloomed since. Each year we look

forward to seeing its blossoms, but usually we are disappointed. Under the pine trees are the best plants of the torch azalea in the entire Arboretum. Here some are at least six to eight feet tall, literally one solid mass of fiery red blossoms. It is easy to notice the injury from the hot sun for some of the blossoms are badly faded and burned at the tip of the petals, but when they are growing in the full shade they keep their color very well for some time.

Continuing down the hill among the azaleas, we come to an excellent group of "Ghent" and "Mollis" hybrids on the left, many of which are just beginning to show their excellent, highly colored blossoms. A number of these are perfectly hardy under Boston conditions and their wide variety of colors are unequaled by any other group of shrubs. On the right is the Arnold azalea, a chance hybrid in the Arboretum, having many of the qualities of *Rhododendron obtusum amoenum* but at the same time being considerably more hardy.

Walking toward the old Bussey Mansion we see another planting of the torch azaleas, where one thousand plants have been placed under protecting pine trees. Among these are a few dogwoods, and as we gaze on this scene for a few moments we must admit that unquestionably this torch azalea is the most brilliantly colored of all the plants we have seen on our trip. In fact, as noted in the Bulletin a few weeks back, it is the most brilliant of all the bright colored plants introduced to this country by the Arboretum from Japan. Turning toward the old Bussey Mansion, we see its porch covered with wisteria blooms. The common old-fashioned type, the Chinese wisteria, is at the front and makes the better display, and toward the rear of the house is the lighter colored Japanese wisteria with its longer flower clusters.

Retracing our steps for a short distance only, we walk down the hill among the beeches, admiring the beautiful young foliage of the different varieties, and now and then glancing toward Hemlock Hill at the base of which the first rhododendrons are just coming into bloom. Once more on the road at the foot of the hill some members of the group continue on toward Peter's Hill and the crab apples, some walk among the conifers, and others turn to the right and walk back toward the lilac collection. On our way we walk under an excellent specimen of the silverbell in full bloom, and a few moments later, off to the left, catch a glimpse of brilliant white which is, on close inspection, a perfect specimen of the flowering dogwood, about forty years old, at least twenty-five feet tall, and literally covered with blossoms from top to bottom. With time getting short, we hasten back to the lilacs where several in the group wish to spend the last moments of the trip, making notes and comparisons of these excellent plants to guide them in making their selections for their own homes. It is just for such concrete purposes as this that the thousands of plants in the Arboretum are being continually maintained.

DONALD WYMAN